

# The Bad Manners of the Campus Left (Video)

It snowed last Thursday (April 20) in Colorado.

It's not unusual for folks in the Centennial State to witness snow in April if the snowflakes are outside. But on this occasion, they appeared inside a university classroom, which, it turns out, is not unusual either.

Having been invited by the local chapter of the student organization, [Turning Point USA](#), I arrived on the campus of the University of Colorado-Denver to deliver a lecture on "Lessons from Ancient Rome." The subject was 2,500-year-old history with a sprinkling of observations about what we today might learn from it all. Not exactly a hot-button topic such as abortion, immigration, Trump, or the most recent season of "The Walking Dead."

What I saw from a minority of radicalized students in the audience, however, was an appalling microcosm of the smug, arrogant, self-righteous, politically-correct, campus insanity that you see on TV with increasing frequency these days.

About a dozen of the students at last Thursday's event interrupted my lecture repeatedly with lengthy diatribes. One held up a sign that read, "Bullshit!" They heckled me. When that failed, they accused me of racism. I was able to deal with the interruptions and conclude my speech, but that was due to a failure in the protesters' organizing capabilities rather than any generosity in their intent. They exhibited far more "selfishness" than the conservatives and libertarians they think of as "selfish" and seek to silence. It certainly helped that the rest of the audience wanted me to speak, and enthusiastically applauded each time I put a protester in his place.

For me, next year will mark 50 years in the “liberty movement.” It was in 1968, a month shy of my 15th birthday and prompted by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, that I participated in a public demonstration in Pittsburgh. So I know and appreciate the importance of protest. In the right places and at the proper times and for noble causes, it’s a healthy and necessary thing. In Mellon Square in downtown Pittsburgh that day forty-nine years ago, we protested the vicious deployment of tanks, guns and troops by a communist regime to crush the rights and freedoms of a neighboring country.

What the hooligans last Thursday at my lecture in Colorado were objecting to was a very different kind of invasion—a peaceful, voluntary offering of ideas they were unaware of, didn’t want to hear, and thought it was their right to prevent others from hearing. Their intent was to intimidate, to harass, to silence, to dominate. This is not conduct that a citadel of education should tolerate for an instant.

Interesting, isn’t it, that what some go to college for, others find “offensive.” As I watched the incident occur, I thought to myself, “I’m standing in a taxpayer-funded institution of supposedly ‘higher’ education, not a Khmer Rouge re-education camp, for crying out loud!”

The disruptions commenced a mere five minutes into my lecture on Roman history, before I had progressed much beyond about 300 B.C. So it was hardly anything I could have said that the disrupters truly found indecent. They had come voluntarily but were annoyed—*deeply and personally aggrieved*, it seemed—for no more reason than the speaker and the sponsoring organization possessed viewpoints they knew little about, didn’t understand, couldn’t articulate, and don’t like.

Far-left students derailing speakers with whom they disagree have been in the news a lot. Sometimes they’ve [resorted to violence](#). [Many times](#), the speech being protested was cancelled

before it happened or protesters forcibly prevented the speaker from finishing his job. My encounter was small potatoes by comparison and fortunately, never descended into fisticuffs. And I *did* push back, and I *did* finish speaking.

When I taught college classes 40 years ago, I didn't tolerate a sleeper or a ball cap, let alone a bad-mannered brat with no respect for the rights of his fellow students. So I wasn't about to let these "progressive" brownshirts shut me up.

Writing in The Wall Street Journal, Manhattan Institute scholar Heather Mac Donald [explained](#) where this tawdry deportment is coming from:

*Campus intolerance is at root not a psychological phenomenon but an ideological one. At its center is a worldview that sees Western culture as endemically racist and sexist. The overriding goal of the educational establishment is to teach young people within the ever-growing list of official victim classifications to view themselves as existentially oppressed. One outcome of that teaching is the forceful silencing of contrarian speech...The silencing of speech is a massive problem, but it is a symptom of an even more profound distortion of reality.*

Like Mac Donald, I doubt that many of the anti-free speech bullies in today's colleges and universities enter those institutions with the intent to shut people up. It's not typically their parents who teach them intolerance, it's a handful of their *professors*—the very professors their parents are bankrolling with their hard-earned tax and tuition dollars. They are besmirching the entire profession, which neither the serious students who want to learn or the good professors who want to teach deserve.

I'm guessing that UC-Denver's course on "[Problematizing Whiteness: Educating for Racial Justice](#)" is not helping matters.

My FEE colleague Jeffrey Tucker recently [shed light](#) on the influence of Herbert Marcuse, a key Marxist intellectual from whom the troublemakers draw inspiration. In a similar vein, I [wrote](#) four years ago about how ugly ideas permeating British academia contributed to ugly behavior in the streets in the wake of Margaret Thatcher's death in 2013.

Here are some highlights of the exchange at the University of Colorado-Denver last week:

A few minutes into my lecture, a student raised his hand and started speaking. I politely said, "Please let me get through my lecture and then we'll have a Q & A period." He muttered something that only those around him could hear, but I doubt it was "Thank you."

A minute or two later, I mentioned that ancient Roman road-building was so massive that nothing would compare in magnitude until the 20th Century. One of the snowflakes found that offensive.

"Not true! The Mayans built roads too!" that same student rudely interjected from the back of the room.

"Yes, the Mayans built roads too, but nothing on the scale of the Romans," I responded.

"Not true!" he insisted. "We have professors who have researched this!"

Well, here are the cold, hard facts: Roman road mileage totaled 250,000. By contrast, the most extensive road system in pre-Columbian South America was constructed by the Incas, not the Mayans, and it amounted to a mere 25,000 miles. Mayan civilization (*everything*, not just the roads) covered about 125,000 square miles at its height, compared to Rome's 2.5 million square miles. You could fit all of the Mayan Empire into just half of the Roman province of Egypt. So the student who felt so put upon and so sure of himself that he had to

interrupt the speaker didn't actually have a clue of what he was babbling about.

There's another point worth making here. Why do you suppose the student was so indignant that I didn't give inflated road-building credit to the Mayans in a lecture on Rome? Answer: Because Romans were white Europeans and in the official Newspeak of far-Left academia, white Europeans are barely a notch above persona non grata. Mayans, on the other hand, were "indigenous, native peoples" who must be elevated and celebrated.

Never mind that the state religion of the Mayan Empire incorporated idol worship, human sacrifice, hallucinogenic rituals and decapitations. Let's not talk about the pandemic internecine warfare of the Mayan Empire, or its severe environmental degradation and enslavement of subjugated peoples, either. That would not be politically correct.

Again, I asked that I be allowed to make my presentation and take questions afterwards. Mumbblings and a few brief outbursts persisted but I mostly ignored them.

Fifteen or so minutes later, another student raised his voice from the back row, "You haven't allowed any questions yet!"

I replied, "I already said I would take questions when the lecture is over, and I promise I'll call on you first." He insisted on speaking then and there, whereupon one of the Turning Point students asked him to leave the room. He did, but returned moments later.

In the video clip above, you can observe a part of this student's Second Coming. As promised, I called on him during the Q & A. Do you suppose his question was about Roman history? Of course not. Here, slightly abbreviated, is how it unfolded:

Student: "You wouldn't take my question when I wanted to ask

it. Why should I listen to anything you say if you won't listen to what I say? Why should I bother?"

Me: "What am I doing right now but listening to you?" A few incoherent mumblings in response, which prompted me to then assert, "This has happened before on some campuses and I'm guessing that you just can't stand the fact that somebody might have a viewpoint different from yours." Vigorous applause followed from the great majority of the audience, boos and catcalls from the minority.

The video clip, unfortunately, doesn't quite capture a subsequent moment that I regard as the high point of the whole affair. I raised my voice to convey an important observation to the disrupter: "You have a character problem!" I doubt he understood that I was informing him that his rude intolerance was not only indefensible, it was a manifestation of something wrong inside, something flawed about his personal choices and conduct.

"Now you're calling me an idiot!" he exclaimed, to which I instantly shot back, "I did NOT say you were an idiot. I said you have a *character problem!*"

That's when some shouting and epithets began to pour forth from the know-it-all snowflakes: "You're a racist! "Bullshit!" Nazi!" And a few F-bombs as well, the first of several aimed at me both during the event and while I was walking to my car. It was amazing how swiftly and seamlessly these wise guys toggled between "offended" and "offensive"!

And oh, the sanctimony was so thick you could cut it with a knife! The slogans that rolled off those immature tongues were what Anthony Esolen refers to in his superb book, "[Out of the Ashes: Rebuilding American Culture](#)" as "cant"—the insincere or hypocritical use of pious language to cover up for one's ignorance while making a pretense to moral superiority. In Esolen's words,

*You have to be educated into cant; it is a kind of stupidity that surpasses the capacity of unaided Nature to confer...*

*People are especially prone to cant when they describe their feelings in public. When someone says, "I am offended by that remark," the first thing you must think, in our time, is that the remark has broken upon the person's day like the bright sun through a week of rain and gloom. An owl is not offended by the little field mouse; it is just what the owl is on the lookout for. If the offended person loses any sleep that night, it will not be for sorrow, but for delightful dreams of vengeance and public displays of virtue. The cannibal rolls up his sleeves and whets the knife. For truly tolerant people are hard to offend. They do not seek occasion to bring others into ill repute. They do not put the worst construction on someone else's words or deeds.*

Disturbingly, this *lowering* of the most basic standards of interpersonal communication makes a mockery of "higher" education in this troubled age of ours.

Blake Scott from Littleton, Colorado was there last Thursday evening (and provided the video clip). In his words, "I was shocked at how the students attacked Mr. Reed with unwarranted claims. Rather than derailing from his speech that he was invited to give, he respectfully took the moral high ground. Hecklers accused him of racism during the question and answer session, claiming he selectively picked students for questions by racial profile, without any evidence whatever. The students constantly attempted to disrupt the speech but he calmly rebutted their outbursts."

Bradley Beck of Erie, Colorado, another eyewitness, says, "The whole time, Mr. Reed smiled and stayed professional, calm and in charge."

So the good news is that this time, the bad guys didn't get away with it.

The increasing frenzy of the campus Left may be an indication that, in the words of Robert Tracinski in "[The Federalist](#)," we are approaching "peak leftism." We should certainly hope Tracinski is right.

Writing in *The Washington Post* on April 20 (the same day as my Colorado speech, coincidentally), Catherine Rampell [advised](#), "Don't blame college students for their hostility to free expression. The fault ultimately lies with cowardly school administrations, who so often cave to student demands for censorship." (In that same article, she recounted a crazy episode at American University in Washington. It's worth your attention. Also, check out the headlines to commentary at [The College Fix](#) and you'll get the drift.)

Rampell makes a good point. Cowardly school administrators are indeed partly at fault, and not just because they coddle reprehensible student conduct. When they hire barbarians to teach in their classrooms and collaborate with them to blackball serious scholars of a different viewpoint, they are accomplices in the degradation of education and the decay of civilization.

But I don't let the students off the hook. They are young adults. Even if they act like toddlers in a temper tantrum, nothing will nip this stuff in the bud quicker than treating them *as adults*. That means one fair warning before a second offense. Then you get expelled and perhaps fined and maybe even a night or two in the slammer, if I had my druthers. Unlike the barbarian Left, I take freedom of speech seriously, and assaults on it even more seriously. Let's stand up to these bullies. Civilization depends on it.

The students from the UC-Denver Turning Point chapter suffer through intimidation tactics from the campus Left all the time, as do courageous students from TPUSA chapters elsewhere, along with students in similar organizations like [Young Americans for Liberty](#), [Students for Liberty](#), [Young Americans](#)



[for Freedom](#), and the [Intercollegiate Studies Institute](#). At FEE, we are proud to work with them, provide literature and speakers and moral support, and we applaud their efforts to resist the barbarians in their midst. If anything, the incident last week only emboldens us to assist them all the more.

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